THE BLIND FIGHT THE AXIS

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Here's how blind workers are aiding in the war effort and paving the way for their rightful place in America's post-war plans

The Blind Fight the Axis

by LOUISE REEVE and DAVID DUBOW

"NOT SO FAST." The newsreel cameraman wanted Bob Courtney to slow down his flying fingers. Bob was selecting airplane starter parts from the pile on the table. "Nobody will believe that you can't see if you work as fast as that. Won't you please grope a little? I want to make this picture dramatic, so it will get sympathy."

"I don't want sympathy. I'd rather have people see how fast a blind man can go," said Bob. But he groped a little, obligingly, because that is what the public expects—the pathetic struggle of a blind worker trying to do something. Whereas the fact is that a blind worker in a job that fits him often proves superior to the worker with full vision.

The camera turned and produced the newsreel that you may have seen—Bob Courtney at his daily job of finishing parts for airplane starters. He has to run two milling machines simultaneously. On his first day on the job, when he was learning the routine, Bob was short two items of his sighted predecessor's production rate. Two days later Bob was topping the rate. By the end of his first week he was well ahead of previous records. And the newsreel man wanted him to go slow and grope and show how pathetically hard it was for him. Bob is a champion worker.

He is one of the army of today's blind men and women war workers who are releasing hundreds of sighted workers for other duties or for the armed services.

Until seven years ago, when Bob Courtney lost his sight, he was manager of a chain grocery store. Blindness found him unprepared for anything else. There was no way, apparently, in which he could use his intelligence. When the war plants called for men, and even blind people were given a chance to prove they could be of use, Bob applied immediately. He is an excellent example of the high quality of craftsman available among the sightless.

The vital element in a blind man's readjustment, Bob believes, is confidence. Until one gains true confidence in his ability to go about the streets alone, a job can't be

Accidentally Ours

SEATED BEHIND his hardwood desk, Dr. Wilhelm von Roentgen, German physicist, dropped a metal key he had been toying with and snapped on a switch that shot 20 thousand volts through a Crooke's vacuum tube. The tube began to glow, bathing the desk in a greenish phosphorescence.

After completing his experiments with the vacuum tube, the scientist developed some photographic plates which had been stored in one of the desk drawers. He was astounded to observe on one of them the image of a key. Roentgen quickly deduced that rays from the tube had penetrated the desk, impinging on the plate. Because the doorkey had luckily been in the path of these uncanny rays, its image was outlined on the plate. Thus the physicist discovered that X-rays, so called because of their baffling properties, could photograph objects imbedded in opaque surroundings. And soon photographs of the bones of the human body were being taken.

ONE DAY IN 1816, Dr. Rene Laennec, noted French physician, was on his way to visit a patient suffering from a heart ailment. Passing a lumberyard, he noticed a dirty-faced urchin picking at the head of a pin which had been driven into one end of a 10-foot board. At the other end, a second boy was listening to the sounds of the tappings, so perfectly were the vibrations carried through the fibers of the wood.

Dr. Laennec was intrigued, for he saw a way of applying this principle to the diagnosis of heart disease. When he reached the home of his patient, he rolled a large sheet of paper into a tight cylinder. Placing one end of it against his patient's chest, and the other to his ear, he found that the action of the heart was amplified. Years later Dr. Laennec perfected this crude device. Thus was born—the stethoscope!

STILL A SMALLER PIECE OF WOOD, 10 inches in length, inspired the famous Thames Tunnel under the Thames River. Sir Marc Isambard Brunel, the British engineer, was studying the problem of constructing a tunnel under the Thames. Whenever engineers dug under the earth, the soft soil caved in.

Brunel happened upon a piece of timber with a hole bored through it from end to end by a marine worm. He noted that the walls of the miniature tunnel were coated with a limy substance which the worm had secreted, thus preventing the hollow material from collapsing.

Emulating the engineering principle used by the worm, Brunel undertook the Thames job, and as his men tunneled the ground, they built up the walls and roof with masonry.—JOSEPH NATHAN KANE

handled with maximum efficiency.

Pioneer blind mica-sorter for Army and Navy radio equipment is slim, dark-haired Mary Murphy. The mica pieces she sorts so competently are built into instruments for airplanes and submarines.

"The mayor of our town got me the chance to do this work," Mary explains. "I had never done anything of the kind before. I had no training." Over and over again the same report comes from the sightless war plant employes. *They had no training.* When the war need came they got the training and then they demonstrated that at some work they could produce more satisfactorily than sighted workers on the same job.

Mary was the first blind person to be employed in this plant, more than a year ago. Her success was so great that a dozen more blind workers are now proving their worth in the factory.

The mica to be sorted comes in pieces from one-thousandth to four one-thousandths of an inch thick. The pieces must be classified into size groups differing one-half of one-thousandth of an inch in thickness. A sighted person must use an electrical gauge. On this job the supersensitive fingers of the blind have been found to be the perfect instrument. The blind sorters are not only faster but *more accurate.*

As a child, Mary learned to read and write Braille. She completed high school by taking notes in Braille and typing them on a regular typewriter. Her mother died and Mary was left at home with her father, four sisters and a brother. "Money was needed," she says, "but I couldn't earn anything. I knew I had intelligence and clever hands but what use were they?"

Now the clever hands are trained. She walks 11 blocks to work with Pearl, her Seeing-Eye dog. Pearl sits by her side every day. Mary is proud of her skill and of her seniority on the job. "It's beautiful," she says. "I love it."

Pretty, curly-haired Jackie Greer assembles fire-extinguisher parts. Before the present emergency she had never ventured beyond the street corner alone. Her family had shielded her since babyhood.

"I went to the Institute for 14 years," she said. "I studied Braille and I learned a kind of embroidery for amusement. But after I finished school I had nothing very interesting to do. When I heard that the war plants were employing blind people, I said now was my chance. Now I could have a job. I was wild with impatience until they accepted me. Oh, it's wonderful. Do I come to work alone? Of course I come alone."

Placement services for blind workers have been established in a number of states. A leader is the New Jersey State Commission for the Blind with headquarters in Newark. Its executive director, George Meyer, is totally blind but is a model of office efficiency and goes about the city at will. In charge of employment is Carl C. Pirups-Hvarre, also completely blind.

Hvarre's technique is to give demonstrations. He goes to plants to sell managers the idea that at many tasks a dexterous blind operative can equal and often surpass the production rate of a seeing worker. Hvarre proves this by

performance on the spot, with no rehearsal. He is taken to a working post, receives brief instructions, experiments a few minutes and then turns out a first-class job. This never fails to "wow" a manager. Hvarre proves thus that the breaking-in process is the same as that for a sighted worker. And when a blind person is on the job he is an ideal worker.

Blind operatives are now operating millers, lathes, drill presses, screw machines, foot presses and power presses. They are doing many types of assembling, processing, packing, sorting, gauging and riveting. At all the factory jobs they undertake they at least equal production rates.

For the safety angle—during the past 42 years in the United States not one compensable accident to a blind worker has been recorded.

If any adjustments are necessary the factory has the cooperation of the commission. If a blind worker for any reason has difficulty in meeting production rates, the commission will shift him to a more suitable position and place the right man in the vacancy. This happens rarely. The special relation of the commission with the blind makes things go smoothly.

A blind and crippled man who has come close to doubling production rates on a drill press is Michael Sofka. His right leg is almost useless from infantile paralysis. He drills one-sixteenth inch holes through metal studs the size of a grain of rice. Mike has operated the drill at record speed for 16 days without breaking a drill. Sighted workers do well to make one of the drills last four days. Around the holes Mike bores there are no rough edges to cause rejects. A huskily built man, with hands abnormally large, his fingers have the sensitiveness that only the blind develop. War needs have given this man his chance to show his worth. Will he be put on the shelf after the war? Industry says no, he is too valuable. He lives in an apartment with his blind wife, who is an excellent housekeeper. Evenings they read Braille and listen to the radio.

Paul Morel was totally blinded at the age of six by an accident. From the age of 13 he has earned his living. He was a door-to-door canvasser before the war, going freely into unknown districts—not begging-canvassing, but selling fuel. He earned bonuses. He has always loved tools and believes there is no tool he cannot use. He was given a chance to tap folk joints for airplanes. Within two days he was producing 110 threads per hour in excess of his sighted predecessor's record on the job.

"I put my heart and soul into my work," he says with quiet enthusiasm. "All blind workers do. That's why we're good."

Paul also cuts covers that hold meters in place on the instrument boards of bombers. He has worked for 58 consecutive days without spoiling a piece. Another of his jobs is to gauge small parts for airplanes and guns. For this he uses a gauge with Braille markings. His presence in the plant has been an unquestionable force for good, the manager reports. His willing industry, his appetite for hard work and his cheerfulness are an inspiration. His nature is happy and he makes friends easily. "He seems to

bring out the best in people," the manager said. "There is no antagonism among co-workers because of Paul's unusual ability."

Employers of blind war workers are unstinted in their praise. "In every case within a few weeks the quality of their work has equalled or excelled that of sighted persons on the same operation," says the superintendent of one of the country's leading aircraft corporations. "The steady and consistent way these blind workers have applied themselves to their tasks has had a stimulating effect on the attitude and production of the sighted workers around them."

The personnel director of a large radio plant supplying war needs writes, "Three blind female operatives are now employed on production operations along with the sighted workers. One of the three girls twisting and retinning wire leads averages better than 15 per cent above the base rate for the job. Other girls are working as mica splitters and gaugers where accuracy to the thousandth of an inch is required."

Blind workers are producers. They concentrate. They have no distractions. The job is their main interest and their pride. They have a deep loyalty for the place in which they have found a new life. Many operations in modern industry are made to order for blind workers. Industry has discovered the value of the blind and will not forget the lesson. Their distinguished performance in America's war plants has earned for the blind a rightful place in the post-war industrial life of the nation, and, in that regard, modern civilization has taken a definite step forward.

On the Range

A MOUNTAIN CLIMBER, one of the guides at Banff, had a particularly talkative and tiresome lady tourist in tow. She asked questions incessantly. At the edge of a high lake, she carefully examined the masses of rock piled at the water's edge. "Why are these here?"

"The glacier brought them down," the guide replied.

"And where is the glacier now?" asked the lady.

The guide gritted his teeth. "Gone up after more rock."

THE FATHER OF the present King of Belgium was an ardent mountain climber. On one of the difficult ascents in Switzerland, he and his mountainborn guide were alone. When they reached the shelter that night, the king wearily dropped down on the bunk and told the guide, who had begun to prepare food, to serve him in bed. The guide obeyed.

The next day Albert arose, eager to start upward again. From under the covers, the guide grunted, "King, I'm tired. I'd like my breakfast in bed."

The monarch grinned, prepared breakfast and served it to his hireling.

—JULIE JOHNSON

Unique is Milt Hersberger's airline—smallest in existence—in Ohio's Lake Erie region. Here the folks have to take a plane or stay at home

Air Cabbie of Put-In Bay

by CAROL HUGHES

ONE MORNING about seven o'clock the telephone rang at the lonely Island Air Terminal at Put-In-Bay, Ohio.

"That you, Milt?" asked a quivering old voice.

"Yes, Elmira, what's wrong?" asked Milton Hersberger.

"Would you take over to Kelley's Island 'afore you set out for your run and bring Lem home? He's done got hisself killed."

Milton Hersberger went out and removed the seats in his tri-motored Ford ship. A few minutes later he took off to bring Lem home. To him it was just a routine flight. He has flown as many as seven dead bodies in a three-weeks' period from one or another of the five islands his plane frequents. He has evened the score with the Grim Reaper by taking as many expectant mothers out to hospitals on the mainland to restore the island population.

Hersberger, probably the busiest airman in America today, is a one-man airport. After 20 years of all types of flying he hit the jackpot in the smallest airline in existence. Located in the Lake Erie region of Ohio, Milt's passengers *have* to fly or stay at home. They fly. All of them, from babies to grandmothers.

Hersberger's stake in the air industry consists of five planes, hangars, and landing fields. He's based at Put-In-Bay, Ohio. His full run is only 14 miles as the crow flies. As Hersberger flies it's 70. He touches five islands in the Lake Erie region with a total population of less than one thousand souls.

It works like this. Every night when Farmer Reuben Becker says his prayers he ends with "praise the Lord for Milt Hersberger, and take care of his planes." Farmer Reuben has a herd of dairy cattle on Kelley's Island. Each spring when the ice around the island is a frozen shifting mass, too thick for boats, too mushy for sleds, the farmer's cattle start getting lean. Reuben gets on the phone: "Milt, can you fly me over a few bales of hay?"

"Sure," says Milt, "you order it —I'll bring it."

Out go the seats in the big Ford ship and in goes a ton and a half of baled hay. Farmer Reuben's critters are safe, and so far the prayers

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